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ABSTRACT

The first part of this presentation lists four basic assumptions pertaining to educating black students humanistically and discusses each in relation to its impact on the public schools' capability to educate blacks effectively and meaningfully. These assumptions are: that black students can be educated by the public schools, that schools are capable of relating humanistically to black students, that universities and colleges are capable of equipping teachers, counselors and related staff with the necessary cognitive and affective skills to educate black students humanistically, and that those holding the power of the various institutions of our society will allow anyone to humanize education for all students. This first part includes that schools as they are presently consituted can neither educate blacks effectively nor relate to them humanistically. The second part discusses some of the possible alternatives that have been used or might be used to maximise the humanistic quality of the schools' program for black students, i.e., an all black student boycott, black control of black schools, and black educators organized for change. It is emphasized that blacks and Third World people, especially, rise above rhetoric and apathy and move deliberately to establish all conditions in the educational institutions that are respective of and responsive to all learners and trainers. (Author/AM)

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EDUCATING

BLACK STUDENTS

HUMANISTICALLY

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EDUCATING BLACK STUDENTS HUMANISTICALLY

Charles T. Williams

For sometime now there has been extensive discussion and debate relative to humanizing education in the public schools in the United States. Williams, Green, Johnson, Banks, Kozol, Cole, Silverman, Holt and others have been some of the most prominent and perhaps the greatest advocates for removing the alienating and inhumane practices for our schools that go on unrelentingly destroying young human beings. The most blatant of these inhumane acts are found in the poor and urban areas, which means that poor people - Black, Latinos, Native Americans and Appalachian Whites are the primary recipients. Given that these people have traditionally not been the favored people of the school systems of the United States, how can those extolling the principles of humanistic education ever hope to have the schools of this society be respective of, responsive to and meaningful for poor and Third World people? Is it realistic to ever assume that the school systems of the United States can become humanistic in their treatment of these groups? Given that Blacks constitute the largest of the Third World groups; and given that Blacks have the least capability (by this society's own standards) of becoming totally assimilated and acculturated into the White middle class mainstream; and given my opinion that if schools can educate Black students humanistically, all students will be so treated, I have chosen Blacks as the focus for this discussion on humanizing the schools.

This presentation is divided into two principal parts. In the first section the basic assumptions discussed which concern the educational institution's capability to educate Black students effectively and meaningfully. The second section focuses on some of the alternative methods in humanizing the schools for Black students.

EDUCATING BLACK STUDENTS HUMANISTICALLY--ASSUMPTIONS:

Any discussion dealing with educating Black students humanistically must include some basic assumptions relative to the capability of the educational institutions in this regard. Those assumptions are as follows:

1. That Black Students can be educated by the public schools.

2. That schools are, or will be, capable of relating humanistically to Black students.

3. Inherent in assumptions one and two is the assumption that universities and colleges are capable or will be capable of equipping teachers, counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, administrators, etc., with the necessary cognitive and affective skills to educate Black students humanistically.

4. That the "system" (those holding the power of the various institutions of our society) will allow anyone to humanize education for Black students or any student for that matter.

In the next sections each assumption will be discussed relative to its impact on the public schools' capability to educate Black students humanistically.

ASSUMPTIONS VERSUS WHAT IS

Assumption #1 - That Black students can be educated by the Public Schools.

Any person in this society who has not been an ostrich with his or her head in the sand knows that schools across the United States have generally failed in meeting the educational needs of Black students. It is not necessary for one to go to professional journals for this information. One only has to watch television, read the local newspaper, or one of the popular national news magazines to know that Black people in this country comprise per capita the greatest number of prison inmates, the greatest number of school dropouts (pushouts), the greatest number of the unemployed, the greatest number in classes for the mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and learning disabilities, and the greatest number of students failing. Further, it is generally known that Black students tend to be funneled into unemployable or underemployed career areas by school counselors. Given this backdrop of devastating occurrences, it becomes rather obvious that schools as they are presently constituted do not effectively educate Black students.

Assumption #2 - That schools are or will be capable of relating humanistically to Black students.

The foundation of learning in the schools of the United States was and continues to be programmed for white middle class students. Consequently, instruction has been primarily monocultural rather than multicultural. It has validated one group as "superior" and invalidated others as "inferior," portrayed one group as the norm while constituting others as deviates, etc.; our schools go on socializing students for dependency rather than independency; vast numbers of educators continue perceiving themselves as omnipotent, all knowing, and incapable of error, while pitying and "missionarying" those poor Black folk who "suffer" from being "culturally deprived"; students do not learn from and with each other; segregation and labeling of students are typical elements within the school norms. Schools pursuing these endeavors are not only incapable of educating Black students humanistically, but they are dangerous to all human beings whose needs they are supposed to be servicing.

Assumption #3 - That universities and colleges are or will be capable of equipping teachers, counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, administrators, etc., with the necessary cognitive and affective skills to educate Black students humanistically.

The public schools can only be as good as the universities and colleges that train their professional personnel. The universities and colleges are the primary causal factor for the institutional processes and functions which occur in the school setting. Their actions have precipitated the establishment and perpetuation of a large complex of "M and M" factories. Consequently, we find our schools characterized by competition as opposed to cooperation; conformity enhancing "success" with non-conformity guaranteeing failure. Further, we find present the doctrine of "differences make a deficit" in full blossom, which has been legitimized through the universities and colleges' shrewd and insensitive research methodology. The impact of such a doctrine, which I have termed "Coleman-Jensen-Schockley-Jencks-Moynihanism," has been to "convict" Black people as "culturally deprived" and "genetically inferior," and sentence them to be "compensatoried" to economic and political annihilation by "benign neglect."

The unfortunate reality is that presently the universities and colleges stand incapable of and/or unwilling to (in either case the results are the same) provide educators with the necessary cognitive and affective skills to educate Black students humanistically.

Assumption #4 - That the "system" will allow anyone to humanize education for Black students or <u>any</u> student for that matter.

Without getting into the quagmire of detailing the "system", I have chosen for this discussion to define the system as that group of people that controls the entry into and power of the various institutions (industry and business, mass media, government, education, church, etc.) in this society. This group not only determines who has access to the <u>resources</u> of the various institutions and to what degree, but also determines who will share and inherit the power of these institutions. The essence of such an arrangement challenges the basic tenets of democracy, such as equal opportunity for all, equal right to protection under the law, the life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, etc.

To humanize education would pose a serious threat to the present key power brokers in our system's institutions, because the present institutional powers and practices need and require schools to produce persons who are conditioned to advance at the expense of other human beings; consider profits more important than human and ecological plight; to consider themselves and others "like" them to be "superior" to other "dissimilar" human beings; to believe that ignorance and poverty are states of choices as opposed to impositions or the only choices available, etc. The humanization of schools (to the chagrin of the key power brokers) would destine ignorance and poverty for extinction. The general citizenry would have the opportunity to an in-depth understanding of and appreciation for the destructiveness of institutional racism and obsessive profitism, both of which subjugate the importance of human beings and extol the worth of goods and elitism.

In the process of schools becoming humanistic, programs would be constructed to have all human beings perceived as being capable of learning; to have all teachers perceived as being capable of assisting students in some way to develop into wholesome human beings; to have students cooperate with each other as opposed to students competing against each other; to have success programmed for all students; to have learning be fun and not work; to have grades and gradedness eliminated; to have the learner participate in determining his or her learning destiny (what they learn and how they learn); to have the issues of learning pertinent to the learner and his or her present and future relationships with other institutions; to have a balance in emphasis on both the affective and cognitive domains; to have as a priority the preservation of life, human and environmental; to have no human being hurt another physically or psychologically; to have students learn and prepare for the process of change rather than the acceptance of it; to have each person responsible for his or her own actions and the affect of these actions on others and themselves; and finally, to have the school sanction the uniqueness and essence of all human beings, their differing values, and life styles.

Based on the previous discussion, it seems obvious that if the "system" allowed schools to become humanized, it would contribute to its own demise. One thing the "system" ain't and that's masochistic. Further, given that power only concedes to power superior to itself, one can only conclude that it is not in the self-interest of the "system" to allow education to become humanistic. Consequently, the "system" will oppose any and all efforts that purport to make schools more respective of, responsible to, and meaningful for all human beings.

SUMMARY:

Looking back over the four assumptions relative to the schools'capability of educating Black students humanistically and responding to the substance of each, I offer what I feel are the only conclusions: schools as they are presently constituted can neither educate Black students effectively nor relate to them humanistically (I see these being one in the same). Further, the universities and colleges stand barren of the substantive training techniques and methodologies to equip the educators with the necessary skills to humanize education for any student. Finally, the "system" or the key power brokers of our institutions will not voluntarily permit education to become humanized because it is not in their self-interest.

In the next section I will discuss some of the possible alternatives that have been used or might be used to maximize the humanistic quality of the schools' program for Black students.

ALTERNATIVES IN HUMANIZING SCHOOLS FOR BLACK STUDENTS

Attempts at providing alternative models by which schools function and hopefully meet the needs of students more effectively have been a common practice for many years. Unfortunately, the processes of adoption and adaptation

(even those recommendations based on empirical research data) have been most slow and tedious in many instances non-existent and in all cases unsuccessful because of the powerlessness of the advocates. The alternatives stressed here relate exclusively to humanizing schools for Black students and tend to be the alternatives most frequently considered as solutions. They are as follows:

1. An all Black student boycott
2. Black control of Black schools
3. Black educators organized for change

Each of these are addressed with the realities of institutional racism and elitism in mind.

AN ALL BLACK STUDENT BOYCOTT

Throughout the history of the United States, Black and other powerless groups have on occasion initiated group action when the institution involved has been blatantly non-responsive to reasonable requests submitted in a reasonable fashion. The most volatile and successful of the group action has been the boycott. The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Caesar Chavez have produced the most notable successes through the use of the boycott with group action. In this instance, we are talking about a Black student boycott as an alternative method for having schools educate Black students humanistically. All Black students, under this method, would be required not to attend the educational institutions until certain institutional structure and practices were modified so as to be more sensitive to and effective in meeting the educational needs of Black students.

Concurrently with the student boycott, it would be necessary to establish an alternative or "freedom" school to provide some substance of learning for the Black students.

Without the establishment of a self-sustaining and self-sufficient organization, economically and politically set up to spearhead the issue, both of the above actions can only be temporary and doomed inevitably to capitulate to the way the "system" would have things be. Oh yes, in the end, there may be established some Black history courses, a few Black teachers may be hired, etc. but the institutional structure, practices, and power brokers remain the same. At best this alternative method will have raised a little hell, raised some levels of consciousness, but also will have been more effective in motivating the "system" in its own self-interest to be more astute or more thorough in preserving itself, a preservation that for the most part will be void of any substantive elements of humanization.

BLACK CONTROL OF BLACK SCHOOLS

Our urban schools grow progressively all Black, poor, ineffective, and oppressive, which are just a few of the characteristics that epitomize and indict the public schools as being racist. Given the factors of white flight, people as well as industries and the force of school desegregation related to the pretentiousness of politicians and judges, Black control over Black schools may be one of the most viable means of humanizing schools for Black students. Black control of Black schools in and of itself, however, does not correspondingly mandate that educational institutions will educate Black students effectively and humanistically. Given the institutional conditioning and socialization impact through which the schools have processed both Blacks and Whites, the probability is that without major modifications of philosophy, unlearning and reorientation, institutional restructuring, and major modification in teaching techniques, etc. that Black schools controlled by Blacks will themselves also be ineffective and inhumane in their relationships with Black students. Contributing to the liabilities of the institutional conditioning and socialization impact is the economic oppression that is caused to a great degree by white industries. The white owned industries have gained their economic salience from the city, but now, because the city is "unsafe," they are splitting to the suburbs taking with them the severely needed financial support necessary for any educational institution to function effectively.

If Blacks are to control their schools and have those schools be effective and humane in meeting the needs of Black students, we as Black people must understand in depth the impact of institutional racism, the impact of the liabilities of institutional conditioning and socialization, and the principles of urban economic "rape." With these as "givens," we must proceed to organize on a broad institutional basis (not on a movement basis which is temporary in nature) to strategize deliberately, purposefully, and calculatedly to establish institutional norms that reflect programs and practices, accompanied by Black financed and Black controlled economic support, that effectively and humanely meet the needs of Black students.

BLACK EDUCATORS ORGANIZED FOR CHANGE

Humanistic education for Black students is contingent, to a great degree, on Black educators becoming viable and effective advocates as well as politically astute change agents.

Although few in number as compared to the total population of educators in the United States, they are inside the institution, which means they are potentially the "Black Trojan Horse." The Black Educators are in a strategic position to know the institution intimately - its strengths, its weaknesses, its formal and informal power systems, how the smallest and largest of institutional changes have occurred and who initiated and carried them out. Further, they are in a position to assess more effectively than any other Black group, who are or are not allies of the Black Community in the educational institutions.

If Black educators are to be the basic thrust in this matter, they must master minimally the following factors:

1. Recognize and understand the sequential processes for change. The steps in this process are awareness, political involvement, power and then change. Inherent in this process is that one must have power to achieve change and that power concedes to nothing other than power superior to itself.

2. Recognize and understand that organizations, not an individual, effectuate change. Inherent in this concept is that the power brokers can destroy an individual much more effectively than they can a broad-based power organization. If an individual is the substance of the action pursuing institutional change, all the power brokers have to do is kill the individual and the substance of the pursuit for change is also killed. It is much more difficult to deal with a broad-based organization that has a collective leadership.

3. Understand that racism is an institutional act and not the act of individuals. Norms are predicated on institutional policies which regulate the functions of positions in the institution. Consequently, one must modify institutional policies and practices in order to effectively change individual behavior.

4. Recognize and understand the political realities of being a minority. When a group is a political minority, that group must, in order to effectively pursue its goals and objectives, form coalitions with those groups whose ideology and self-interests are similar. In this instance I am particularly referring to the Black educators coalescing with the Black community. What greater ally could Black educators have than the Black parents, relatives, and friends of the Black students, especially when the issue is providing a more effective and meaningful education for Black students. In order to have an effective coalition with the Black community, Black educators must communicate and participate with the Black community on an ongoing basis and not just during a crisis. Other groups that Black educators should coalesce with are Black civic organizations and highly conscionable white organizations who are presently supporting or taking action to make schools respective of, responsive to, and meaningful for Black people.

5. Acknowledge the power of the teacher unions in bringing about institutional change. The teacher union, through the collective bargaining process, determines institutional policies jointly with the boards of education, which dictates to a great extent how the institution will treat its professional personnel and the recipients of the institution's services. Notwithstanding the racism that exists in teacher unions, Black teachers, in order to effectuate desired institutional change, must exert their presence in these groups, become knowledgeable of the teacher union's structure and practices, its power systems - informal and formal, decision making processes, and become a force to have teacher unions advocate principles and programs beneficial for Black students.

6. Recognize the need to assist Black students to organize into a viable force. Black students represent a very crucial ally, for they are greater in number than the Black educators, represent the future treasury of the Black community, and, besides, it is in the self-interest of Black students to become organized and participate in determining their own destiny. Some of those things the Black educators should be assisting the Black students in this regard are as follows:

   A. Build Black dignity for and among Blacks.

   B. Emphasize cooperation and "communityness" as opposed to competition.

   C. Provide opportunities for decision-making experiences relative to their own destiny.

   D. Refine and systematize survival and coping skills for this hostile and inhumane society.

7. Come to grips with the need to provide Black professional guidance and direction for the educational institution. Black educators locally must cease the "hurricane mutedness" that has revealed them as having little or nothing to say about what schools should be doing to relate more effectively to the educational needs of Black students.

8. Understand and appreciate that school board members must be elected on the basis of whether they will support humanizing schools for Black students. Black teachers must devise a means to assess school board candidates relative to their opposition to institutional racism and their support for an affective and meaningful education for Black students. School board members are needed who feel schools must serve not rule, that schools must be of the community as well as in it, and that schools must be for learning, not pedantic masturbation.

9. Finally, Black teachers must recognize that, in order for them to pursue meaningful educational change for Black students, they must first start with themselves. They must be willing to become and continue to be knowledgeable and skillful so as to be effective in assisting Black children to develop as wholesome and skillful human beings. They must be willing to confront behavior that is inhumane to Black children. Last, and perhaps most important, is that Black educators must be willing to be a viable change agent (a high risk taker) and an effective advocate for Black students, knowing full well that if a real difference is to come, it will be because they, the Black educators, played an important role in making it happen.

In the pursuit of humanizing the educating of Black students, the application of each one of the alternative models at given points in time would be appropriate. However, in terms of substance, effectiveness and permanence in confronting institutional racism and elitism in the schools, "Black educators organized for change" would be the most viable.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I think it's fair to say that Black people and all people committed to humaness cannot afford to wait for the educational institutions to change themselves so as to be humanistic in educating Black students. This is because the waiting will never end, and we can ill afford to tarry any longer when the most precious treasury of the Black community is at stake - the Black child. Consequently, Black people, Third World people, highly conscionable whites and we as Black educators, in particular, must and should feel an intense and major responsiblity to rise above the rhetoric and apathy and move deliberately, purposefully, and calculatedly to establish all conditions in the educational institutions that are indeed respective of, responsive to, and meaningful for all learners and trainers.

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